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# Major Willie Redmond and Irish Home Rule

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## Abstract

After the 1880s, the Irish Nationalist Party demanded Irish Home Rule. In 1914, the Third Home Rule Bill was passed in the House of Commons. It then only awaited Royal Assent, but soon after the outbreak of the Great War, the British government decided to postpone the enactment of Irish Home Rule. Willie Redmond, MP, the brother of John Redmond, enlisted for the Irish Division in the British Expeditionary Forces and was killed in the Battle of Messines in 1917. Willie's death caused a vacancy in the East Clare constituency and the Sinn Fein candidate, Eamon de Valera, won the seat. This was a significant turning point in Irish Nationalism from Home Rule to Republicanism. This article will examine Willie Redmond's motives and discuss the cause of Irish Home Rule in the context of the Great War.

To distinguish from John Redmond, MP, Willie's elder brother, and William Archer Redmond, MP, Willie's nephew, the author will use the popular name of Willie for William Redmond in this article.

## 1. Historiography

William Heoy Kearney Redmond (Willie Redmond) (1861-1917) was a Parnellite MP and Land League activist. His brother, John Redmond, became the leader of the Irish Nationalist Party in 1900, and, following the outbreak of the Great War, John Redmond and the Irish Nationalist Party eventually supported recruitment in Ireland in order to achieve Home Rule. Willie took the initiative by serving in the Royal Irish Regiment but was killed in battle in 1917.

Terence Denman published *A Lonely Grave* in 1995. It is the only biography about Willie that is currently available. There have not been enough monographs on the Great War in Ireland. Denman's *Ireland's Unknown Soldiers* (1992) and Keith Jeffery's *Ireland and the Great War* (2000) are standard studies of the topic.

After Willie's death, there was a vacancy in his constituency of East Clare and a by-election was announced. The victory of Eamon de Valera in this election would lead Sinn Fein into the mainstream of Irish nationalism. Kiran Sheedy's *The Clare Elections* (1993) surveyed the election history of Co. Clare in general. Daniel McCarthy's *Ireland's Banner County* is a local history of Clare with a careful analysis of the major elections.

In this article, the author will examine the meaning of Willie's enlistment through a reading of his speeches and essays, then reconsider the implications of the Sinn Fein victory in East Clare in the context of the Great War.

## 2. Recruitment in Ireland

On August 4, 1914, Britain declared war against Germany in the cause of Belgian sovereignty and neutrality. With the outbreak of the war, the Irish Home Rule Bill (Third), which had been passed in the House of Commons for the third time in June, was suspended in the middle of the legislative process. The Irish Nationalist Party was confronted with deadlock over their hard fought policy, but the war provided a timely excuse for the British government to avoid the risk of a civil war in Ireland.

Two Home Rule Bills were introduced in Parliament in the United Kingdom during the W. E. Gladstone cabinet. The First Bill, in 1886, was defeated in the Commons after a revolt of some Liberal MPs, and the second one, in 1893, met the same fate after a large majority of the members in the Lords voted against it. Anti-Home Rulers supported the Ulster Unionists' cause and voted against Gladstone's Bills. Particularly after the defeat in the Lords, the anti-Home Rule stronghold was recognised to have put an end in practice to the Home Rule solution in Ireland. Then, following the crisis of the People's Budget under the Liberal government in 1909, the legislative power of the Lords was limited in the Parliament Act of 1911. Under new provisions, which restricted the Lords' veto over the same general bill within two sequential sessions, a third Home Rule Bill was introduced in the Commons by the Asquith government in 1912 and was expected to be enacted in 1914.

The anti-Home Rule Ulster Protestants organised a large resistance movement under the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP). In September 1912, the Ulster Solemn League and Covenant was formed under the leadership of Sir Edward Carson, the party leader of the UUP. They pledged themselves to 'use all means' to resist the establishment of the Home Rule Parliament in Ireland. In January 1913, they formed the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) with a membership of 100,000 men between the ages of 17 and 65. The UVF tried to arm themselves through gun-running.

In the meantime, Home Rulers also formed the Irish Volunteers in November 1913 under the leadership of Professor Eoin MacNeill. The Irish Volunteers went into military training and took up gun-running, like the UVF. In the spring of 1914, John Redmond, the leader of the Irish Nationalist Party demanded half of the Irish Volunteers' executive posts so as to establish control over the Home Rule militia. MacNeill and the executive members reluctantly agreed and their decision caused a rapid increase in the membership from 80,000 to 180,000.

When Britain entered the Great War, two groups of armed Volunteers confronted each other over the Home Rule Bill in Ireland. Soon after the outbreak of the war, Redmond proposed to the British government that the Irish Volunteers serve in home defence, but the British government and the Army Office rejected his proposal and demanded that the Irish enlist for the war in Europe.

John Redmond eventually accepted the British government's demand. Then the Home Rule Bill received Royal Assent on 18 September, with the condition that enactment be postponed until the end of the war. Redmond's policy on enlistment led to a split in the Irish Volunteers. A large majority followed Redmond and became National Volunteers, but a minority of 10,000 Volunteers remained under MacNeill who rejected enlistment in the British Army. The latter would be reorganised under a militant nationalist organisation, the Irish Republican Brotherhood, and fight in the Dublin Rising of 1916.

On 20 September, Redmond made a speech on his new policy at the Volunteers parade in Woodenbridge, Co. Wicklow. He said: -

The duty of the manhood of Ireland is twofold. Its duty is at all costs to defend the shores of Ireland from foreign invasion. It has a duty more than that, of taking care that Irish

valour proves itself on the field of war as it has always proved itself in the past. The interests of Ireland, of the whole of Ireland, are at stake in this war. The war is undertaken in defence of the highest principles of religion and morality and right, and it would be a disgrace forever to our country, a reproach to her manhood, and a denial of the lessons of her history, if young Ireland confined their efforts to remaining at home to defend the shores of Ireland from an unlikely invasion, or should shrink from the duty of proving in the field of battle that gallantry and courage which have distinguished their race all through its history. I say to you, therefore, your duty is twofold. I am glad to see such magnificent material for soldiers around me, and I say to you: go on drilling and make yourselves efficient for the work, and then account for yourselves as men, not only in Ireland itself, but wherever the fighting line extends, in defence of right and freedom and religion in this war. (O'Hegarty, 1952, pp. 687-688)

In the Woodenbridge speech, Redmond urged the Irish Volunteers to enlist in the British New Army being organised under Field Marshal Kitchener, Secretary of State for War. Since the British government pledged to enact the Home Rule Act of 1914 after the war, the Irish Nationalist Party had no choice but to gain victory over Germany.

Willie was appointed an Honorary Treasurer of the National Volunteers, and inspected Volunteer Units in several counties. During this inspection, he witnessed the extent of the confusion in the ranks. Maurice Moore, a Volunteer officer in Co. Mayo, shared Willie's apprehension about Irish enlistment. Moore said that 'there are many Volunteers who don't know much about the matter in dispute and if they parade for us at all will join in all right afterwards. They are not Sinn Feiners but don't want to go off to fight in Belgium.' (Denman, 1992, p. 35)

After the split in the Irish Volunteers, even the Redmondite National Volunteers were confused and troubled by their leader's suggestion to join the British Army and to fight on the battlefields of the continent.

At the beginning of November 1914, Stephen Gwynn, Irish Nationalist MP, and Thomas Kettle, the former Nationalist MP, joined the Army. The first list of nine soldiers who were awarded the Victoria Cross was published. One of them and the first posthumous recipient of the VC was Lieutenant M. J. Dease from Westmeath who was killed in the Battle of Mons on August 23<sup>rd</sup>. (*London Gazette*, 16 November, 1914) The name of one of C. S. Parnell's relatives was among the Roll of Honour in the same week. (*Freeman's Journal*, 19 November, 1914)

In the tense atmosphere of an ongoing war, Willie eventually made up his mind. Shortly afterwards, in Cork, he disclosed his intention to join the Army. On Sunday afternoon, he reviewed local Volunteers at Mardyke Park and presented colours, one embroidered with the Golden Harp and the other with the Crest of Cork City, to the local units. Then he spoke to them of his own determination to enlist. Later at a public meeting in front of the Victoria Hotel, he made another speech urging Irishmen to enlist with him. He spoke:

I speak as a man who bears the name of a relation who was hanged in Wexford in '98 — William Kearney. I speak as a man who with all the poor ability at his command has fought the battle for self-government for Ireland. Since the time — now thirty-two years ago — when I lay in Kilmainham prison with Parnell. No man who is honest can doubt the single-minded desire of myself and men like me to do what is right for Ireland. And when it comes to the question — as it may come — of asking young Irishmen to go abroad and fight this battle, when I am personally convinced that the battle of Ireland is to be fought where many Irishmen now are — in Flanders and France — old as I am, and grey as are my hairs, I

will say, 'Don't go, but come with me'. (Denman, 1995, p. 84)

This news, with several photographs, appeared both in national newspapers and in local ones in Cork. It was even carried through the Atlantic cable to the other side of the ocean. *The New York Times*, which was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for its reporting of the Great War, stated:

William Redmond, brother of the Irish leader, has joined the army with the rank of Captain. He was formerly Lieutenant in the Wexford militia. This makes the second member of the Irish party in Parliament to join the colors, the other being Stephen Gwynn. (*The New York Times*, 24 November, 1914)

Contemporary newspaper articles show how the enlistment of incumbent Members of Parliament, especially the brother of John Redmond, became a major topic, which was precisely Willie's intention.

A few months later, Willie wrote to Patrick Linnane, his close friend and a local politician in Clare, about his reasons for joining the Army. In a long letter, he wrote:

I am firmly and absolutely convinced that the future freedom, welfare and happiness of the Irish people depend on the part Ireland plays in the war ..... There may be a few who think that the Germans would not injure Ireland, and that they would even benefit her. I hope the Clare people will rely on no such statements. If the Germans come here — and they will if they reach Great Britain — they will be our masters and we shall be at their mercy. What that mercy is likely to be, judge by the treatment given to Belgium. The Belgians never did the Germans any harm, and yet Belgium was invaded and the Belgian people massacred, and their homes and churches destroyed. A niece of my own, a nun, has been a victim — driven from her convent home by shot and shell. If, in the time to come, we in Ireland could not show we had struck a blow for Belgium, then, indeed, I believe that our name would be disgraced ..... It would be ungrateful and inhuman if we stood idly by while English, Scottish and Welsh people were in danger, and their women and children killed in cold blood — as happened in Scarborough.

There is another consideration, and it is our kith and kin throughout the British Empire. Every reform we have won has been largely by their constant and generous aid. Canada and Australia and New Zealand have been our loyal friends in our hour of strife. Their parliaments and their statesmen have ever pleaded for our rights. If Germany wins this war these people will have their homes, their property, and even their very lives in danger. Are we to leave these people who are our friends without our aid? If we did so, we should be justly disgraced.

Apart from this I regard the act which restores our own parliament as a treaty of peace with the people of Great Britain. The British democracy has shown us help and sympathy. Every reform we now enjoy we owe to their loyal help and constant support. Everyone in Clare who feels better off than thirty years ago must know that it is due largely to our British friends. Without their aid the Irish party could have done nothing. (Denman, 1995, pp. 85-86)

Willie mentioned the benefits of the relationship with the British, comparing them with the German invasion of Belgium. His parliamentary career happened to start under consecutive Conservative governments. It was called the era of Constructive Unionism, under the slogan of 'killing Home Rule with kindness'. Conservative Chief Secretaries in Dublin Castle introduced

several measures to reform political and social institutions in Ireland.

Arthur Balfour created the Congested District Board (CDB) in 1891, which was responsible for alleviating poverty, particularly in the area of the Atlantic coast. The CDB constructed and improved local fishing facilities, among other programmes. It attempted to stop emigration by paying for such public works. Some parts of Clare were included in the area of the Congested District, and they benefited from the new policy. The purpose and function of the CDB continued after the independence of the Irish Free State, although the remit of the Board itself ended in 1923, the year after the founding of the state.

Gerald Balfour, Arthur's brother, reformed local government in Ireland. The Local Government Act of 1898, together with women's suffrage, introduced a more democratic voting system than was the case with the national parliamentary elections of the time. This reform helped the Catholic middle class to become more influential in local society.

George Wyndham, a cousin of the Balfour brothers, introduced the Land Act of 1903, commonly known as the Wyndham Act. This was recognised as a decisive measure of land reform. Since the mid-1880s, a liberal group of Conservative politicians had attempted to change the Irish land system from one of landlordism to that of peasant proprietorship. Under the Wyndham Act, two thirds to three fourths of the current tenants were to become small landed farmers.

Besides the benefits of these political and social reforms, the composition of the Parliament in the United Kingdom was essential to Willie's argument about having a good relationship with the British. In his time, there were 670 seats in the House of Commons. The Irish Nationalist Party held about 70 to 80 of the 103 Irish seats. This meant that any parties representing Ireland were in a permanent minority in the Commons, so they had to form some kind of coalition with a British party, the Liberals or the Conservatives. Otherwise, no Irish Acts could be passed in the Commons, much less in the Lords.

Under Parnell's leadership, the Irish Nationalist Party often supported one or other of the British parties, depending on the current issue or bills in the Commons. Then, during the Parliamentary crisis over the People's Budget, the Liberals required the Irish Nationalist Party's support to achieve the Liberals' Budget and the Parliament Act. Under such circumstances, in exchange for the Irish Nationalist Party's support for the Liberal government, the Third Irish Home Rule Bill was introduced by the government and passed in the Commons.

The permanent minority position of the Irish Nationalist Party led to Willie's logic about cooperation with 'British friends'. And it precisely reflected the position of the Irish Nationalist Party, as a Parliamentary institution, in the framework of the United Kingdom. Once the Asquith government decided that Home Rule would be enacted after the war, the Irish Nationalist Party had no alternative but to win the war against Germany together with their 'British friends'.

The letter continued:

As for me, I have all my life long, thirty-two years in parliament, done my best for Ireland. I am far too old to be a soldier, but I intend to try to do my best, for whatever life remains in me, to show that Ireland, at least, is true to her principles, and not in any way ungrateful to her friends throughout the world. Tens of thousands of our young men are going to strike a blow for Ireland's brave and gallant men if they knew that one of the old hands is willing to go with them. I believe the men of East Clare will approve of my action. If they should not, then we shall part with nothing on my side but the earnest gratitude for the unvarying kindness ever shown by (sic) me by the people I have done my best to serve for twenty-three long years. (Denman, 1995, p. 86)

John Redmond, as the leader of the Irish Nationalist Party, showed his principles in the Woodenbridge speech, and Willie followed his brother by enlisting. Willie's intention was to appeal to the Irish people, not only to members of the National Volunteers but also to all potential enlistees, to go into the British Army and to win Irish Home Rule, as the Asquith government had promised.

There were five Members of Parliament and one former MP from the Irish Nationalist Party who served in the British Army during the Great War. In addition to the aforementioned Kettle, a former Nationalist MP who was killed in action in the Battle of Somme of 1916, and Gwynn, who had enlisted before Willie, Willie Redmond himself, William Archer, son of John Redmond, D. D. Sheehan and J. L. Esmonde all went to the Front one after the other. Their military service, especially the two incumbent Members of Parliament from the Redmonds, indicates the difficulties the Irish Nationalist Party had in achieving Home Rule during the Great War.

### 3. The Dublin Rising and the Western Front

When Willie decided to enlist, he was 53 years old. There were many commanding officers older than him in the Army during the Great War. Field Marshal French, Commander-in-Chief of the British Expeditionary Force, commanded Britain's first battle against German troops at Mons at the age of 61. French's successor, Douglas Haig, was the same age as Willie. Field Marshal Kitchener, Secretary of State for War, was 64 at the outbreak of the war. Field Marshal Frederick Roberts, 1st Earl Roberts, from the famous Waterford family, was called back from retirement and died of disease at the age of 82 on the Western Front in November, 1914 on a visit to Indian troops. (*Freeman's Journal*, 18 November, 1914)

Unlike those military men, Willie had not had a proper military career. Since leaving the Wexford militia in his teens, his career had been in politics. There were no exact upper age limits to voluntary enlistment, but the Derby Scheme of 1915 targeted men between 18 and 40, so the military authorities presumed that Willie was too old to go to the Front.

Three Divisions of Kitchener's New Army started to be raised in Ireland. The 10<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> Divisions were formed mainly from Catholic Irishmen, and the 36<sup>th</sup> Division was from the Ulster Protestants. The Irish Nationalist Party officially urged the National Volunteers to enlist for the 16<sup>th</sup> Division. Willie naturally wished to join the 16<sup>th</sup> Division under the command of Lieutenant-General Sir Lawrence Parsons.

John Redmond sent a letter to recommend possible officers for the 16<sup>th</sup> Division to Parsons, and received the following reply on October 26, 1914:

I hope to pick out a (sic) good gentlemen from those whose names you sent me to recommend for commissions. I like to see all candidates before I recommend them so as to form an opinion of their likelihood to make efficient officers with power of command. You know as well as I do how Irish peasants can judge of a man whether he is a good gentleman or not, so that discretion must be used. I am selecting, as far as I can find them, suitable gentleman (sic) who have been associated with the National Volunteers and are likely to induce them to enlist. (Denman, 1992, p. 42)

Receiving so many requests for commissions from all sides, Parsons was very careful and uncompromising in his selection of officers. Parsons, an Irish Protestant and related to an old Irish family, the Earls of Rosse in Offaly, did not support Irish Home Rule, and his priority for officers'

commissions was given to suitable class and social backgrounds more than political faith. Whereas Parsons respected Willie's knowledge of trench warfare, his enthusiasm for Home Rule did not affect Parsons at the beginning. Above all, Willie's age seemed to be a problem. In a letter to J. J. Hogan on January 22, 1915, Willie wrote:

I had a most interesting correspondence with General Parsons. For some reason or other he did his best to put me off. At last when I put it to him that he would have to state a reason for not accepting me he wrote saying he was sending on my name as a captain. His hesitation may have been political or it may have been good nature. At any rate he did his best to raise my grey hairs on my head with his account of all the hardships before me including active service very soon. (Denman, 1995, p. 86)

One month later, Willie was gazetted by the War Office as a temporary Captain for the 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the Royal Irish Regiment, part of the 47<sup>th</sup> Brigade, which was commonly known as the Irish Volunteer Brigade, of the 16<sup>th</sup> Division. This battalion was the one he used to belong to in his teens in Wexford.

After training in Fermoy Camp, Co. Cork, the 16<sup>th</sup> Division moved to England in September 1915. On this occasion, Willie was under strong pressure to stay in Ireland and to campaign for Irish recruitment. However he refused, saying, 'I did not join the Army to make recruiting speeches but to go to the front with my men'. (Denman, 1995, p.91) The Royal Irish Regiment finished their training course, then crossed the Strait of Dover and arrived at Le Havre on December 18, 1915.

In February, the Battalion had its first experience of the trenches and no less than forty-eight soldiers were found medically unfit for further service and sent back. Despite Willie's high spirits, many people felt apprehensive about his situation among the troops. The Bishop of Killaloe wrote asking him to consider his age and health. Walter Long, a Unionist MP and a former leader of the Irish Unionist Alliance, asked Kitchener 'to recall poor Willie Redmond from the front, for which he was obviously too old, and give him a commission as Chief Recruiting Officer in the south of Ireland'. (Denman, 1995, p. 94)

Taking his first leave on March 1916, Willie delivered a speech in the House of Commons on the day before St. Patrick's Day on the ordinary soldiers serving in the trenches of the Western Front.

Send us out the reinforcements which are necessary ..... Send us out the necessary supplies, and when you do that have trust in the men who are in the gap to conduct the war to the victory which everyone at the front is confident is bound to come ..... I do not believe that there was ever enough Germans born into this world to depress them. If it were possible to depress them at all, it can only be done by pursuing a course of embittered controversy in this country as to which was the right way or the wrong way of conducting affairs at the front. When a man feels that his feet are freezing, when he is standing in heavy rain for a whole night with no shelter, and when next morning he tries to cook a piece of scanty food over the scanty flame of a brazier in the mud, he perhaps sits down for a few minutes in the day's dawn and takes up an old newspaper, and finds speeches and leading articles from time to time which tell him that apparently everything is going wrong, that the ministers who are at the head of affairs in this country ..... are really more or less callous and calculating mercenaries, who are not directing affairs in the best way, but are simply anxious to maintain their own salaries. I say that when speeches and articles of that kind are found in the newspapers, they are calculated, if anything is or can be so calculated, to depress the men



who are at the front. (Denman, 1995, p. 95)

While describing the routine of soldiers in the trenches, Willie, as an MP, reminded his colleagues of their responsibilities to their political and legislative duties. A politician serving in the battlefield could perceive how soldiers at the Front knew how their government and politicians were working at home, and how this had to affect the soldiers' morale.

At noon on 24 April, Easter Monday, the troops of the Irish Volunteers, calling themselves the Irish Republican Army, occupied several buildings in Dublin. Patrick Pearse, the President of the provisional government, proclaimed the establishment of the Irish Republic, a completely independent state from the British Empire. It was the Dublin Rising of 1916.

When the Rising began in Dublin, Willie was still on leave. He knew how quickly such news of terrible affairs at home arrived at the Front. In haste, he went back to his company serving in the front line, rejecting the government's attempt to keep him in Ireland.

Brigadier General George Pereira wrote to him:

I am sorry about this unfortunate business in Ireland, and you have my entire sympathies. Anybody who has seen the way you sacrifice all comfort and security for the sake of your men, will appreciate what you have done for Ireland. (Denman, 1995, p. 96)

This letter crossed paths with Willie as he was returning to France. In the tense political situation, many officers at the Front, one of whom was another Nationalist MP, Gwynn, thought it would be better if Willie had stayed in Ireland, but Willie stuck to his cause and stayed in the trenches.

The German troops displayed placards on the Dublin Rising in order to discourage the Irish troops at the Western Front. Willie reported the high morale of the Irish troops to his brother, John. This pencil note was sent to *The Times* and the content was forwarded to some other papers. *The New York Times* covered it with the headline 'Germans urged Irish to quit trenches':

London, May 5. – Immediately after the outbreak of the Irish revolution, German soldiers in trenches opposite the Irish division fighting on the western front put up signs inviting Irishmen to join the Germans, according to news received by John E. Redmond, the Irish Nationalist leader, from his brother, Captain William H. K. Redmond, now at the front. One notice read:

"Irishmen in Ireland are in revolution. English guns are firing on your wives and children. Sir Roger Casement persecuted. Throw your arms away. We give you hearty welcome."

Another sign read:

"We are Saxons, and if you don't fire we won't."

The Irishmen replied by playing an Irish air and "Rule Britannia" on mouth organs. (*The New York Times*, 6 May, 1916)

Appealing to the Irish troops' morale at the Front, Willie was really shocked by the fact that the Dublin Rising was carried out with German support in the form of arms and ammunition. Moreover, he viewed the political repercussions of the Rising very pessimistically. He expressed his opinion to Gwynn: 'Don't imagine that what you and I have done is going to make us popular with our people. On the contrary, we shall both be sent to the right about at the first General Election.' (Denman, 1995, p. 97) At this stage, Willie was aware of the danger caused by the Irish Nationalist Party's

policy on Home Rule together with their help with British enlistment for the Great War.

#### 4. Identity of the Irish Divisions

Approximately 210,000 Irish soldiers are supposed to have served during the Great War. There were many channels through which they could enlist. If both Irish immigrants and short time migrant workers are taken into account, Irish enlistees could join the Army not only from Ireland but also from Great Britain, the Dominions and even from the USA during the last stage of the war. The records of enlistment confined to Ireland show the total number to have been 140,000. (Jeffery, 2000, p. 7)

Among the three Irish Divisions, the 10<sup>th</sup> Division was sent to the front of the Dardanelles, and it engaged in the Battle of Gallipoli and some minor battles from the Balkan Peninsula to Turkey. In July 1916, just after the Dublin Rising, the 36<sup>th</sup> Division was thrown into the Battle of Albert, which was the beginning of the Battle of the Somme. Then the 16<sup>th</sup> Division moved and was allocated a post next to the 36<sup>th</sup> Division.

Willie often came and went between two Irish Divisions, one for Home Rule and the other against. He wrote some essays at the front, and in one of them, on September 13, 1916, he wrote:

And every month thousands of all ranks are dying thus. In the cemetery where the writer stood by the graves of these two boys he counted in one tiny corner alone, eleven white crosses newly erected. Each of these crosses bore the name of a young Irish officer, and in only one instance was the recorded age more than twenty-five years.

These young men came from the North of Ireland and from the South, with the famous Irish regiments – the Connaught Rangers, the Dublin Fusiliers, the Irish Rifles, the Munsters, the Leinsters, the Inniskillings (sic), or the Royal Irish. They professed different creeds; they held different views on politics and public affairs; but they were knitted and welded into one by a common cause. They fought side by side for their country, they died side by side, and in this little French cemetery, with the great cross, they lie side by side in their last long sleep.

And so to-day do Irishmen rest in all the fields in the long-stretched battle lines of Europe. Would that all those who still may harbour bitterness and rancour against any of their own countrymen in Ireland might stand for even one moment and read the cross inscriptions in the cemeteries of France! Those inscriptions which tell of glorious and eternal union of brave Protestant and Catholic, and Northern and Southern Irish hearts! (Redmond, 1917, pp. 68-70)

A collision of interests between the two denominations in Ireland had been the main obstacle to Home Rule since the 1880s. In December 1916, Willie again spoke to the Commons both on his hope for the Irish Home Rule solution and on the troops' solidarity at the front.

In the long war of attrition, large reinforcements were essential for all the Irish Divisions. In October 1916, Willie's plea for Irish recruits appeared in several papers. He wrote on the current state of the 16<sup>th</sup> Division:

The behaviour of the division has been exemplary, and both officers and men have shown on all occasions the utmost gallantry and devotion to duty. The number of military honors won by the division is over 300, and includes two Russian honors. On one occasion the division found itself side by side, holding a line, with the Ulster Division, and when the

men met from time to time the best of good feeling and comradeship was shown as between brother Irishmen. Such, in brief, is the record of the first two years of the existence of the Sixteenth Irish Division, composed, as it is, like other divisions of men, the overwhelming majority of whom had absolutely no experience of soldiering when they joined from all parts of Ireland.

It remains to be said that the Sixteenth Division needs reinforcements – and at once. It would be a thousand pities – indeed, it would be like a betrayal of the heroic dead – if the division which has brought so much honor to the Irish name ceased to be Irish. This must inevitably happen unless reinforcements come from Ireland. It is the confident hope of the officers and men alike that all who love Ireland will see to this. Whatever other difficulties there may be, is it too much to ask that all who love Ireland shall unite, irrespective of creed or policies, to keep the Sixteenth, the ‘Irish Division’ what it was at the Loos trenches and at the hard-fought fields of Guillemont and Ginchy? (*Freeman’s Journal*, 17 October, 1916; *The Times*, 17 October, 1916; *The New York Times*, 17 October, 1916; *The Irish Times*, 26 October, 1916)

Among the three Divisions raised in Ireland, the 10<sup>th</sup> Division had losses of three quarters of the force in the Battle of Suvla Bay in August 1915. On the Western Front, the 36<sup>th</sup> Division had heavy casualties in the fierce Battle of the Somme. Reinforcements from Britain to these two Divisions were decided in October 1916. Reorganised with non-Irish soldiers, the Irish identity of these Divisions was virtually lost, and the 16<sup>th</sup> Division also faced the same identity crisis.

Willie’s last speech to the Commons, in March 1917, shows the significance of the Division’s national identity in the context of Home Rule. He spoke:

Ireland is the only portion of the Empire now fighting which is not self-governing. The Australians whom I meet from time to time point to their government being free: the Canadians and the New Zealanders do the same, and we Irishmen are the only units in France to-day taking our part in the war who are obliged to admit that the country we come from is denied those privileges which has made the Empire the strong organisation which it is to-day. (Redmond, 1917, p. 181)

It is not a particularly strange notion that rights could be gained through military service. The Empire at war needed all of its member states to contribute, so this had to provide an opportunity for Ireland to achieve a Home Rule Parliament and self-determination. Willie made the point of keeping the Irish identity of the 16<sup>th</sup> Division, because it was so significant that even one Division could survive with their Irish identity intact to the end of the war, namely the time of rewards.

Meanwhile, the political situation in Ireland was changing drastically. Sinn Féin, which aimed at Irish economic independence and had not participated in the Rising, inherited the political legacy of the Dublin Rising. In the by-election of February 1917, Sinn Féin put forward Count Plunkett, father of one of the executed leaders of the Dublin Rising, and won the seat for Roscommon North against the candidate nominated by the Irish Nationalist Party, and in the next by-election, in Longford South, Sinn Féin’s candidate, Joseph McGuinness, a senior officer in the Rising and imprisoned, again beat the Nationalist candidate in May. These results in parliamentary by-elections indicated that sympathies for the participants in the Dublin Rising had been determining votes for the anti-British Sinn Féin.

Soon after the Longford South by-election, the Rural District Council of Ennis, the capital of Co. Clare, resolved to congratulate Sinn Féin. At the same time, they passed another resolution in

which the District Council asked Willie to resign his Parliamentary seat and so give the people in East Clare an opportunity to select a person who would represent their views and wishes. Unfavourable winds for the Irish Nationalist Party blew in Willie's constituency.

The British Expeditionary Force planned a massive attack on the Germans on the Western Front. Messines Ridge was a strategic point in the Ypres area and the Battle of Messines would be the prelude to the Third Battle of Ypres. In the beginning of June 1917, the 16<sup>th</sup> (Ireland) Division and the 36<sup>th</sup> (Ulster) Division were disposed alongside the attack line facing the Messines Ridge.

Willie, who had already been promoted as a commissioned officer to Major, was prohibited from going to the Front by his Commanding Officer. The day before the Messines attack, Willie insisted on going with his battalion and he eventually obtained permission to go, but with the third wave in the attack.

At 3:10 a.m. on 7<sup>th</sup> June, an explosion of 19 large mines was the starting signal for the attack. Soon after the beginning of the battle, Willie was found with shellfire wounds on his arm and leg. Rescued by a soldier of the 36<sup>th</sup> Division, Willie died in the evening with the Anglican chaplain to the Ulster Division at his side.

Eleanor, Willie's wife, received over 400 messages of condolence: from the Pope, King George V and Queen Mary, the chiefs of states and prominent politicians all over the world. The French government posthumously awarded Major Willie Redmond the Legion of Honour. Then the by-election in East Clare was announced.

## 5. The East Clare by-election

On June 17<sup>th</sup>, following a requiem mass for Willie, the Irish Nationalist Party held a meeting in Ennis to select their candidate for the upcoming by-election. Patrick Lynch from Ennis, ex-Crown prosecutor for Kerry, was unanimously selected as the official candidate. Twenty years later, Lynch would be appointed the 6<sup>th</sup> Attorney General of the Irish Free State (1936-37) and of Eire (1937-40) by Eamon de Valera. (Ferguson, 2005, p. 233)

At the Sinn Fein election meeting, several candidates were considered. Peadar Clancy from Cranny, Co. Clare, who had taken part in the Dublin Rising, and MacNeill, the President of the Irish Volunteers, were among them. Finally, they selected de Valera, former Commanding Officer of the Dublin Rising and just released from Lincoln Jail. (Sheedy, 1993, pp. 327-330; McCarthy, 2002, pp. 146-149)

There were a few issues in the East Clare by-election. However, the major disputes between the two parties were over nationality and conscription.

De Valera started his first election speech in Ennis in Irish to impress upon people the issue of Irish Nationality. There were also many reports about the Irish language being spoken during the Sinn Fein election campaign by the candidate himself and his supporters. (2 July, and 3 July, *Irish Independent*)

Edward MacLysaght, a genealogist and de Valera's supporter, commented on the atmosphere of the time:

We realised that the republic was more than a dream and that home rule was a poor thing not worth striving, much less dying, for. Maybe we were asleep in that sense, but assuredly we had begun to stir in our sleep. I know that for my part, and I could name dozens of others like me, I had been captured by the ideals of the Gaelic League years before 1916. It seemed to me then that Home Rule politics were uninspiring, if not sordid, and in common with the

other young men with whom I discussed things I felt that the one really vital desideratum was an Irish-speaking Ireland. (McCarthy, 2002, p. 148)

The Gaelic League, founded in 1893, aimed to revive Irish as a spoken language. Language and the literary revival movement were considered basic to Irish nationality, and sometimes to Irish separatism from Britain. Therefore, to speak the Irish language, even only in the opening part of a speech, was an assertion of Irish nationality and carried with it the particular intent of distinguishing the nationality of the Irish from that of the British.

Concerning Irish nationality, the Irish Nationalist Party's campaigners pointed to the Spanish stock and American citizenship of de Valera, and called him a foreigner. Sinn Fein replied that Lynch, in his professional capacity as an ex-Crown prosecutor, had accused his fellow countrymen.

A major dispute, namely conscription in Ireland, then led to the next phase of the campaign. At the beginning of the Great War, Britain and her Dominions, except for South Africa, did not have any compulsory military service. A shortage of manpower for the war soon emerged, and compulsory enlistment was inevitable. In January 1916, the Parliamentary Act for Conscription in Britain, which was limited only to single men, was passed. However, it failed to secure enough manpower for the front, and compulsory enlistment was expanded to married men in May.

Conscription had been a controversial problem in Britain as well as the Dominions. Objections to compulsory enlistment came not only from conscientious objectors but also from industrial unions, because of the shortage of manufacturing workers. In New Zealand, conscription was introduced in August 1916. Canada followed in September 1917, but the new law caused a riot in Quebec. Australian referenda voted out conscription twice, in October 1916 and December 1917.

In Ireland, the political unrest of the Dublin Rising in April 1916 was the major reason for excluding Ireland from the Conscription Act. Nevertheless, it was felt necessary in the course of time to apply compulsory military service to Ireland. In Clare, conscription was already rumoured in 1915, and some farming labourers started to emigrate to the United States to avoid military service. (McCarthy, 2002, p. 114)

On the campaign trail in Clare, de Valera spoke of the danger of British conscription and called on people to refuse military service:

We do not know what the future – the immediate future – may hold. England is not satisfied to see the manhood of Ireland at liberty, instead of swelling her ranks to help as someone said, to drive the Germans beyond the Rhine. But by doing that you would be strengthening the power of your oppressor instead of fighting, as Irishmen can, the fight of small nations at home. Tis (sic) breaking John Bull's heart to see you here, but if he wishes to conscript Ireland, Redmond's or Dillon's or our words will not prevent it, but your determination to die at home can. (McCarthy, 2002, p. 152)

In the same way, Sinn Fein and the Irish Nationalist Party made their positions on conscription clear. Lynch's pledge to the voters was:

The Irish Party have so far successive prevented the application of CONSCRIPTION to this country. If elected, it will be my duty as a Pledge-bound Member of that Party to assist in the strenuous and unrelenting opposition which the Party has publicly proclaimed it will maintain, as it has up to the present successfully maintained, to prevent any legislation for the application of Compulsory Military Service to Ireland. (*Irish Independent*, 7 July, 1917)

Lynch also criticised Sinn Fein's abstention policy from Westminster, which was preparing a Bill to extend conscription to Ireland, by saying that such a policy could not prevent new legislation from being passed. (Sheedy, 1993, p. 331)

The Sinn Fein camp, quoting Parnell, claimed that to attend the UK Parliament was now harmful to Ireland:

We now recognise that we can no longer help Ireland in the House of Commons. Parnell said that 'England has no right in Ireland, and can never have any right in Ireland: that English law has no moral force in Ireland,' and if Ireland goes to that Parliament, and gives it a semblance of legality, we won't go there, because it would be recognition on our part that that Parliament was entitled to rule Ireland, and make laws for the Irish people. (7 July, 1917, *Irish Independent*)

Both parties were against conscription in Ireland, and the argument in the Clare election made the difference between their political actions clear. Sinn Fein denied the British legislative rights in Ireland. Their policy of abstaining from the UK Parliament was an explicit rejection of a foreign legislature. The Irish Nationalist Party asserted the necessity of attendance in Parliament even if only to prevent the Conscription Bill. However, it was not the Parliamentary Party's objections but the political unrest after the Dublin Rising that had excluded Ireland from the Conscription Act in 1916.

To serve the British Army or Navy had been a continuous phenomenon in Ireland, even long before the Great War. Apart from the military profession, the urban working class was a major source for enlistment. British military service was a type of migrant labour for Irish workers. After the enactment of conscription, they had enough chances to enter the service voluntarily. Therefore, a large majority of the Irish people were supposed not to want compulsory military service.

Antipathy towards conscription and criticism of the Irish Nationalist Party, who had encouraged enlistment since the outbreak of the war, entered the debate in the Clare election. Lawrence Ginnell, an independent MP and a supporter of de Valera, made the accusation that 'Mr. Redmond was a most powerful weapon in the hands of the English rulers of Ireland'. Ginnell also described the Irish Nationalist Party's recruiting policy as 'treachery of the blackest kind'. (*Connacht Tribune*, 7 July, 1917) Nobody mentioned the late Willie, but criticism against John Redmond and the Irish Nationalist Party suggested negative views about the former MP of the constituency.

The voting results on 10 July produced an overwhelming victory for de Valera with 5010 votes to 2035. An Irish national newspaper commented that 'the attempt to apply any form of conscription to Ireland at the present moment would be like throwing a lighted match into a powder magazine'. (*The Irish Independent*, 13 July, 1917) As a consequence, the expansion of conscription to Ireland would be held off until April 1918.

With the Sinn Fein victory in the Clare election, it seems that the electorate abandoned a key policy of the Irish Nationalist Party. In fact, the mainstream of Irish nationalism would shift rapidly from a Home Rule solution to Republican separatism; the end of the Great War was to be followed by the Anglo-Irish war (1919-1921). Still, both the Clare election and the political rise of Sinn Fein in 1917 need to be considered in the context of the Great War. The above-mentioned commentary by *The Irish Independent* suggests that a major issue of the Clare election, at least in its final stages, was conscription.

At the beginning of the Great War, when Willie enlisted, voluntary enlistees rushed to recruiting offices in Ireland. Some joined the Army for the political cause of Home Rule, or for

anti-Home Rule, while others had economic motives. During the Great War, the large number of people enlisting from urban areas accorded with a traditional pattern in which the urban working class would have been a major source of military manpower.

In 1916, the British government introduced a new policy to expand grain products at home. It created more jobs in the farming areas of Ireland. Of the 140,000 soldiers recruited in Ireland, 85% were enlisted before August 1917. At the time of the Clare election, manpower for the military was running out, and compulsory military service was an urgent matter in Ireland.

The Irish Nationalist Party, as well as Sinn Féin, opposed conscription. The difference between the two parties was clear from the measures each chose to oppose it. The tactics of the Irish Nationalist Party amounted to speeches and votes of protest in the House of Commons. Since the number of Irish seats in the Commons was a permanent minority of some 100, their tactics did not seem to be of much practical use. On the other hand, Sinn Féin rejected the fundamental rights of the UK Parliament to Ireland, and appealed to the Irish people to stay in their homeland to resist conscription. A decisive factor in the Clare by-election can therefore be supposed to be that as to which party the people felt had the better tactics on this issue.

Willie's observation on Irish prosperity, as already examined, needed British friends in Parliament. It reflected the precise position of a minority party in the Commons. Basically, Willie's idea was founded on political union with Great Britain. The formation of the United Kingdom in 1801 made Ireland a permanent minority nation within the Union. Both the Home Rulers in the 1870s and the Irish Nationalist Party in the 1880s were organised in a way that was agreeable to the Union.

Home Rule politics within the framework of the United Kingdom had been supported for decades in Ireland, but the context changed during the Great War. The drying up of military manpower in the United Kingdom and the crisis over compulsory military service made it clear that British parties which represented nations already conscripted would never support the Irish Nationalist Party's anti-conscription position in the Commons. The Great War, an unprecedented total war, revealed the limitations of the Irish Nationalist Party's politics, in general, together with their policy regarding the Home Rule solution in Ireland, in particular.

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